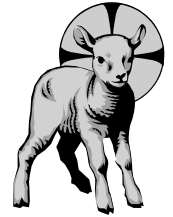




Enjoying God: Life in All its Fullness

(passages from John's Gospel)

Summer 2017



John 15:1-17 Fruitfulness

(sermons: July 16)

Introduction

The picture of a vine is used several times to describe Israel in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 5:1-7. The picture is usually of a vine that has gone wrong, producing wild grapes, or being unfruitful. The nation is rebuked for social injustice.

Jesus uses the picture of a vine to describe himself, the person who embodied all that God had hoped from Israel; as with many of his parables, some of the details may just be there to make the illustration more realistic, so we must be careful how far we try to find a meaning in every detail.

John 15:1-8 The Vine and the Branches

v.1 the true vine – as opposed to Israel, the inadequate, unfruitful vine in Isaiah 5:1-7 (see box below).

v.2 every branch – shoots and tendrils, rather than big boughs

v.2 he prunes – the word for 'prunes' also means 'cleans'

v.3 you are already clean – or 'pruned' (see v.2); Jesus is encouraging the disciples rather than telling them off or threatening them; but he wants them to be more fruitful.

v.3 because of the word I have spoken to you – all of Jesus' teaching

v.4 remain in me – 'abide in me' (RSV), 'remain united to me'

1. What sort of fruit does Jesus expect individual Christians, churches and communities to produce? Is this 'fruit' restricted to the evangelistic 'fruit' of new Christians or does it include Christian character (as in Galatians 5:22-23) and our impact on the society around us (in contrast to unfruitful Israel, condemned for failing to live out the commandments) ?
2. 'Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes' (v.2). How does God 'prune' us? What might the unproductive growth, which needs to be pruned, represent in terms of ways in which we might spend our time, energy and emotional involvement? (see Hebrews 12:4-11) Why does God 'prune' us?
3. How, in practice, do we 'remain in' Jesus (vv 4,5) ?
Do we really believe v.5b: 'Apart from me you can do nothing'?
4. Who did Jesus mean, at the time he was speaking, by the broken-off branches and what happens to them? How far are the details only part of the agricultural setting, or what might they refer to today?
5. The promise of answered prayer in verse 7 is similar to the promise in 14:13-14. What condition does Jesus give here for our prayers to be answered?

John 15:9-17 Jesus' Love, Joy and Friendship

v.13 Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends – the emphasis is on the ultimate demonstration of love for friends, rather than on dying for friends as opposed to enemies.

v.14 you are my friends if you do what I command – this does not mean that obedience makes us Jesus' friends (his friendship is a gift) but that you can tell who is a friend of Jesus by whether they try to obey him, and that friendship grows through obedience.

- v.15 *servants – or ‘slaves’; the word means both.*
- v.16 *You did not choose me – in case the disciples might be tempted to be proud of Jesus calling them ‘friends’, Jesus reminds them that he took the initiative in calling them to follow him.*
- v.16 *to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last – in this verse the ‘fruit’ seems to refer more particularly to changed lives and making new disciples*
6. What more do these verses (*esp vv 10, 12*) teach us about how we ‘*remain in*’ Jesus and his love?
 7. Jesus has already told the disciples to ‘*love each other*’ (v.12, *compare 13:34*). What is new here in Jesus’ teaching about the quality of this love, or the reason for this love, or the result of this love?
 8. What does Jesus mean by the ‘*joy*’ that he offers? How can we experience that joy? How might it be different from ordinary happiness or satisfaction? (*compare John 10:10*)
 9. ‘*Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*’ (v.13) To what was Jesus primarily referring when he used these words? (*see end of v.12 and v.14*) Is it appropriate to use them in the context of war memorials and Remembrance Day ceremonies?
 10. What is the difference between ‘*servants (or slaves)*’ and ‘*friends*’ in *verses 14-15*? Do we ever feel that we have some insight into God’s purposes for us and the world? Is it important that we follow Jesus with conviction that his ways are right, rather than submitting to God because he is powerful? Do we ever feel that the Christian life is a matter of duty, performed reluctantly or even resentfully, rather than being joyful service? How can we act as sons and daughters rather than as slaves? (*see also Galatians 4:6-7*)
 11. Jesus tells the eleven disciples, ‘*You did not choose me, but I chose you...*’ (v.16). Why does Jesus emphasize God’s sovereignty, rather than our human responsibility, at this point? When do we need to remember this emphasis: when we are tempted to pride? when we doubt our strength to carry on? At what times do we need to remember the other side of the truth, our own responsibility to respond: when we are tempted to be lazy, or to bury our talents, or when we ignore the needs around us?

Isaiah 5:1-7

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard:

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

[2] He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines.

He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.

Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

*[3] "Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.*

[4] What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?

When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

[5] Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard:

I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed;

I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.

*[6] I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns
will grow there.*

I will command the clouds not to rain on it."

*[7] The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel,
and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.*

And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

